

CHAPTER VII

ABORTION, INFANTICIDE, KILLING THE OLD

The able-bodied and the burdens. — The advantages and disadvantages of the aged. Respect and contempt for them. — Abortion and infanticide. — Relation of parent and child. — Population policy. — The burden and benefit of children. — Individual and group interest in children. — Abortion in ethnography. — Abortion renounced. — Infanticide in ethnography. — Infanticide renounced. — Ethics of abortion and infanticide. — Christian mores as to abortion and infanticide. — Respect and contempt for the aged. — The aged in ethnography. — Killing the old. — Killing the old in ethnography. — Special exigencies of the civilized. — How the customs of infanticide and killing the old were changed.

314. The competent part of society; the burdens. The able-bodied and competent part of a society is the adults in the prime of life. These have to bear all the societal burdens, among which are the care of those too young and of those too old to care for themselves. It is certain that at a very early time in the history of human society the burden of bearing and rearing children, and the evils of overpopulation, were perceived as facts, and policies were instinctively adopted to protect the adults. The facts caused pain, and the acts resolved upon to avoid it were very summary, and were adopted with very little reasoning. Abortion and infanticide protected the society, unless its situation with respect to neighbors was such that war and pestilence kept down the numbers and made children valuable for war. The numbers present, therefore, in proportion to the demand for men, constituted one of the life conditions. It is a life condition which is subject to constant variation, and one in regard to which the sanctions of wise action are prompt and severe.

315. The advantages and disadvantages of the aged. Mores

of respect and contempt. Those who survive to old age become depositaries of all the wisdom of the group, and they are generally the possessors of power and authority, but they lose physical